

LIBERATION

A Journal of Democratic Discussion

No. 12

One Shilling

CONTENTS

Editorial	2
Bantu Education in Action	15
Goa—S.E.A.T.O. Base For War?	8
Can C.O.D. Win Mass Support?	19
The Spectre of Belsen and Buchenwald	22

Editorial

THE LAST DAYS OF EMPIRE

OUR times are full of storm and conflict; of toil and trouble; of suffering and bloodshed; of terrible wars and threats of war. Yet, to those of us who are able now and again to raise our eyes and our thoughts from the daily struggle for existence, to see the world about us in its perspective and its history and its future—what a stirring and wonderful era is this we live in! For this is the time of change. Never before have there been such dramatic and far-reaching changes in human society. Before our eyes the entire structure and pattern of man's social life, the world over, is being re-shaped.

The mighty, seemingly everlasting Empires that, thirty or forty years ago, bestrode the world, are crumbling. From their ruins, a new world, holding fairer promise for the human race than our ancestors dreamed was possible, is struggling to raise itself. "The old order yieldeth, giving place to new"—but with what bitter reluctance it yields! The cataclysmic destruction of two world wars; and the endless series of cruel "colonial" wars that have gone on without cease in some corner or other of Africa and Asia and South America, between the two wars and since then—these testify to the grim determination of imperialism to fight to the last ditch to maintain itself.

It is not far from the last ditch, now.

Empires, in past ages, have come and gone: only to be replaced by others. The profoundly new feature of our era is that we are witnessing the disintegration and the destruction of the last of the empires. We are on the threshold of a new age when the very concept and roots of imperialism will be extirpated; when all nations, great and small, will live together in independence, security and fraternity.

AN OLD STORY

History knows of innumerable examples of conquest and domination. Egypt, Persia, Greece and Rome. Portugal and Spain. Holland and France and Turkey and Britain. Germany, Italy, Japan . . . The list could go on for pages. All invaded and subjected other peoples and built mighty empires. Each has itself, at some time, known the conqueror's foot upon its soil, the humiliation of rule by strangers, speaking an alien tongue and treating the "natives" like dirt beneath their feet. There is hardly a corner of the world that has not rumbled beneath the feet of invading armies. Sometimes they were merely robber bands, out to capture loot and slaves and then go home. Sometimes they were landless tribes, perhaps themselves dispossessed, seeking to conquer fresh pastures which, once conquered, would become their new homeland, where they would settle and in time merge with the people about them.

And, sometimes, they were the professional soldiers of a great power, bent on establishing its suzerainty all over the earth, in order to exact the conqueror's tribute from all peoples, to enrich its wealthy classes, and to impose its religion and language, its culture and its laws everywhere. Such, for example, was imperial Rome.

Time was when Rome ruled all Europe, North Africa and the Middle East—"all the world" as they knew it. As with all empires, humiliation, taxation, downright robbery, followed in the wake of the victorious Roman armies. There also followed civilisation, Roman laws and the art of writing, and other fruits of advanced culture. Rome did not invent these blessings; for the most part they were the conqueror's loot from the more advanced civilisations of Africa, Asia and Greece. But at least, it can be claimed that the ancient Roman Empire did not only destroy and exploit but also played an educating and civilising role. It transmitted the fruits of the rich cultures which bloomed in Egypt, Persia and Athens, to the barbarians of North-Western Europe: the British, Dutch, French, Germans and Belgians.

THE SCOURGE OF THE PALEFACE

The Roman Empire declined and fell. New conquerors arose, from Mongolia in the East and from Morocco in the South, and held their sway over vast territories and populations. And they, too, went the way of Rome. Departing, they left the way clear for the newly-formed nations of North-Western Europe to build up, slowly at first, what was to become the most gigantic, powerful and enslaving imperial system of all. New developments in production in these countries had brought

a new class to the forefront—the money-mad bourgeoisie; advances in navigation, exploration and military techniques gave them the vision of new worlds to conquer, of which the old Romans had never dreamed: the Americas, Central and Southern Africa, Australia and the Far East. In a few short centuries they had planted their flags and their garrisons and their traders and their missionaries in every corner of the globe. The loot of the world poured into the harbours of Western Europe; the poor people of those countries remained as poor as ever, but their wealthy classes built up enormous fortunes. To them, the conquest and colonisation of the globe was a glorious and profitable adventure. To the rest of the globe's inhabitants it was the Scourge of the Paleface.

For few such mitigating factors as had marked the era of the ancient Caesars attended those later empire-building efforts. Incredible cruelties were practised by the Spaniards and Portuguese when they pillaged, plundered and murdered in South America, destroying utterly the ancient Aztec civilisation. In North America, the so-called "Red Indians" were ruthlessly driven from the land and all but exterminated, as were the original inhabitants of Australia. Throughout Asia, the British and the French and the Dutch and the Portuguese sent their armies of occupation and established their alien rule. Great companies were set up to organise the mass export from those countries of raw materials, the systematic exploitation of their people's labour and their countries' mineral and vegetable wealth.

GOLD, SLAVES, IVORY

And in Africa? The Gold Coast, the Ivory Coast, the Slave Coast. How well those names sum up the goals that brought the "Westerners" to this continent, and that set them fighting among themselves for the rich spoils. English and French and Portuguese and Belgian and Italian businessmen and adventurers swarmed over the country for their loot of precious metals, rubber, cocoa, elephant tusks and . . . people! Vast herds of elephant that once roamed the continent were slaughtered. Chiefs who had never dreamed of the concept of private ownership of land were persuaded to put their thumb-prints on a piece of paper in exchange for a wagon-load of worthless trade goods—and then informed, at the point of a rifle, that they had sold their country to foreigners. Or were befooled by some missionary into asking for the protection of the Great White Queen over the seas—only to find that Her Majesty's "Protectorate" included the right to govern his people and dispose of his land by armed force—and should he show his displeasure, to depose him and appoint a more docile Chief in his place. No different, indeed, from the "protection" offered by the Chicago gangster.

How many peaceful Africans were seized by force and transported in hellish slave-trading ships—in which countless numbers perished of disease, thirst and starvation—to be sold like cattle to labour in sugar-fields and cotton-plantations thousands of miles from their homelands? Millions of their descendants today populate whole countries in the Pacific, and form the majority of the population in the Southern States of the U.S.A. Vast fortunes, the foundation of British and American capital accumulation, were amassed from their labour.

It is true that the impact of imperialism awoke the sleeping, static societies of the darker-skinned people and impelled them along the path to progress. But this was not of deliberate intent; indeed, the sahibs were at pains to retard those societies and prolong their backwardness, the easier to rule them. Every reactionary institution—Rajahs, chiefs and petty tribalism—was preserved and twisted to serve the purposes of dividing the people and acting as a lever of indirect rule by imperialism. It is true the invaders built railways and ports—the better and speedier to ship their loot to Europe.

Though they claimed to be following the Roman tradition of civilising and educating the barbarians, the modern imperialists of the past two centuries held vast populations in a state of illiteracy. Their libraries and their universities, like their institutions of Government and administration, and their highest achievements, electric power and the water closet, were kept with few exceptions “for Europeans only”—that odious sign that gave their pious pretensions the lie.

THE LAST STAGE

As capitalism developed into its highest and final stage of monopolies, in which the bankers and the manufacturers fused into a single all-powerful class, the colonies assumed a new significance. From simple spoliation of raw materials, they proceeded to establish large processing plants, where their capital could be used to greater profit by exploiting the cheap, unorganised labour of the colonial peoples. As they had long ago done in their home countries, they proceeded to force the people from the land on to the labour market. Through taxation and naked force, they drove them to work on their mines and farms and plantations.

Tremendously speeded by new sources of industrial power, and driven ahead by their insatiable and urgent greed for profits, the imperialist powers raced to extend their territories and their rate of exploitation to the utmost. Competing madly to get there first they carved up Africa among themselves; criss-crossing the map of the continent with tidy lines, with squares and triangles neatly coloured red, green and blue—bearing no relation to linguistic or natural boundaries, drawn thousands of miles away in the diplomatic thieves' kitchens of Europe. “Time is money,” was their slogan, and money was their god. So they opened wide the throttle and went full speed ahead.

Full speed ahead to their doom.

For the speeding imperialist locomotive had irreparable faults, fatal sources of friction that could lead only to its smash-up. There was the friction, building up to white heat, within each metropolitan country, between the financiers who ruled and the masses who laboured for them in their factories, mines and mills. Secondly, there was the movement of the peoples of the conquered colonial territories, arising anew with ever-growing unity, national consciousness and ardour to claim back their homelands, and joining forces with the rebellious workers of Europe against the common exploiter and tyrant. Thirdly, there was the explosive rivalry between the great imperial powers themselves: the first-comers had seized and shared out the world, but powerful

newcomers had arrived, greedily reaching out for their share of colonial super-profits.

THE ILLUSION OF STABILITY

These fatal flaws in the imperialist machine were hidden. To all but the sharpest-eyed, clearest-brained observers (and there were a few such) the stability and permanence of White world domination seemed unquestionable, inevitable, God-ordained.

Consider Britain at the opening of the present century, in the full tide of the Victorian heyday, surveying the world with no little self-satisfaction and arrogance. British manufacture and commerce were paramount all over the world. The Union Jack waved over the mightiest empire in all history, on which "the sun never set," and (though not without considerable trouble and unpleasantness) a large slice of South Africa had just been added to it, containing the richest goldfields on earth. Strong and confident, Britannia ruled the waves. It seemed unthinkable that a few short years would see the colossal structure of the British Empire shattered. Unthinkable, that is, to those who could not discern, below the surface illusion of stability, the irresistible forces of history at work.

Then, in August, 1914, the smouldering rivalry of the great dominant Powers burst forth into the first world war for the re-division of the empires: a conflagration that raged for four years, and left the imperialist system shaken to its foundations.

On Easter Monday, 1916, certain remarkable events took place in Ireland, England's oldest colony, whose subjugation began 800 years ago. A group of armed Irishmen, headed by Patrick Pearse and James Connolly, marched in and took possession of the Dublin Post Office. The national flag was unfurled, and Pearse read out a document proclaiming the establishment of the Republic of Ireland. It was the signal for a general rising all over the country. The rising was ill-organised; it was savagely and rapidly suppressed; but it was the writing on the wall for imperialism, a warning forerunner of the tidal wave of national liberation soon to sweep through the colonial world.

AN EMPIRE VANISHES

On November 7, 1917, a whole great empire vanished. The workers and peasants of the Russian Tsar's vast, sprawling dominions arose and put an end forever to the rule of the capitalists and landlords throughout what is today the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, in a rumbling, tumbling explosion whose fateful reverberations still echo and will do for long years to come.

By the end of the first world war another empire—Austria-Hungary—had disintegrated. Britain and France swallowed Germany's former colonies (the Union got a morsel as well), but the whole fabric of their imperial systems had been weakened, and a new rival, the lusty developing capitalism of the U.S.A. was already busy shouldering them out of their monopolies in their colonies, spheres of influence and markets. In the Far East, still another imperialist rival was challenging them: Japan.

The process of imperial disintegration that was begun in 1914 was enormously accelerated and magnified by the Second World War. We have no space even to begin to catalogue the astonishing changes which have taken place: changes so vast that anyone daring to predict them twenty, even ten, years ago would have been dismissed as a raving lunatic. Nations, oppressed for centuries, have arisen to claim their rights to independence and self-government. Consider the implications and the meaning of the great assembly of African and Indian countries which took place this year at Bandoeng! There were the representatives of the People's Republic of China, a country of 600 million people, now sovereign and independent after centuries of imperialist domination and exploitation. Of the Republic of India—360 million strong. The Republic of Indonesia—79 million. Burma, Pakistan, the Gold Coast, Egypt, Ceylon. . . Not all of them, perhaps, yet fully independent, but all on the march against colonialism, not only to free their own countries, but also in the cause of all subject and dependent peoples everywhere. And still, with dramatic swiftness, the liberatory process goes on. France has received her marching orders in Indo-China, the United States in Korea.

THE VELD-FIRE OF FREEDOM

Desperately, with savage ferocity, the imperialists strive to retain what is left of their shrunken "possessions." France, in Morocco and Tunis, Britain in Malaya and Kenya try to stem the flood of freedom with barricades built of the corpses of patriots—whom they miscall "bandits" and "terrorists." To no avail. As they try to stamp out the veld-fire of freedom on one side, it breaks out again on the other. Africa, Asia, the Middle East—the whole colonial world is throbbing and turbulent for liberty and democracy, from Cyprus to Goa, from Ireland, still combatting the crime of partition, to the Sudan, resisting all domination, whether from Britain or from Egypt. Where will it break out next? We do not know; but what is certain is that imperialism itself is fast nearing its end. Reeking with countless abominable crimes, there will be few to mourn its passing.

Among those few will be the Nationalist Party of South Africa, who properly identify their own gross tyranny over the non-white majority with the ruthless colonial administration of London and Paris and the financial emporors of Wall Street. A bitter irony, that those who claim the traditions of the Afrikaner republicans of 50 years ago in their epic resistance to the mighty British Empire, should have joined Chiang Kai-Shek and Syngman Rhee as last-ditch defenders of Anglo-American domination, running-dogs of imperialism!

As for the great majority of the people of South Africa, the oppressed African people and all democrats, white and black, there is no doubt where they stand in this great struggle of our times. We are not spectators, we are participants. Every victory for our colonial brothers is a victory for us. The imperialists have been forced to give back India and China to the people. They will have to give back Africa, too. *Mayibuye i' Afrika!*